

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

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S E C R E T NICOSIA 2546

NODIS

FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: EVOLUTION OF OVERALL SITUATION

REF: NICOSIA 2491 AND 2518

1. AS WE HAVE EXPLAINED IN NICOSIA'S 2518, THE MARONITE LEADERS' PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IN THE CURRENT CONFLICT IS TO ELIMINATE PALESTINIAN POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON. THIS TO THEM IS THE CRITICAL ISSUE. THEY WOULD HOPE THAT SYRIAN PRESSURE AND THEIR OWN RECENT SUCCESSES MIGHT BE SUFFICIENT TO PERSUADE THE PALESTINIANS TO ACCEPT REFUGEE STATUS IN LEBANON. THE MARONITE LEADERS, HOWEVER, ARE REALISTIC ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE PALESTINIANS UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS ARE NOT LIKELY TO GIVE IN AND ACCEPT THE CAIRO ACCORDS WITH CHRISTIAN MODIFICATIONS. CONSEQUENTLY, CONTINUED MILITARY PRESSURE MUST BE EXERTED, AND THIS THE CHRISTIANS ARE DOING IN THE NORTH, THE EAST, AND THE SOUTH, AND WITH SOME SUCCESS. THE PROBLEM IS THAT TACK COULD TAKE A LONG TIME, PARTICULARLY IF THE PALESTINIANS CONTINUE TO OBTAIN FINANCIAL, MATERIEL, MANPOWER (FROM IRAQ) AND POLITICAL SUPPORT FROM THE OTHER ARAB STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION. IN THE MEANTIME, THE APRITION OF THE COUNTRY WOULD BECOME MORE AND MORE SOLIDIFIED.

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2. ONE MEANS OF HASTENING THE PROCESS WOULD BE FOR THE

SYRIANS, IN TANDEM WITH THE MARONITES, TO MOVE AGGRESSIVELY AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS. IT IS UNCLEAR FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS TO WHAT EXTENT THERE IS JOINT PLANNING BETWEEN THE SYRIANS AND THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS. OUR GUESS IS NOT VERY MUCH. WE INFER THIS FROM THE FACT THAT A NUMBER OF OUR CONTACTS ASKED US WHAT WE THOUGHT THE SYRIAN OBJECTIVES IN LEBANON WERE -- HARDLY THE QUESTION A NATION ASKS ABOUT A CLOSE ALLY. OBVIOUSLY, THE CHRISTIAN LEADER CLOSEST TO THE SYRIANS IS FRANGIEH, WHO KNOWS HAFEZ ASAD WELL FROM HIS EXILE IN SYRIA IN 1958. ACCORDING TO FRANGIEH, SYRIA IS NOW COMMITTED TO HELP MAINTAIN LEBANESE SECURITY UNTIL THE PALESTINIANS STOP PREVENTING PEACE AND INTERNAL SECURITY IS RESTORED. HE ACCEPTS ASAD'S UNILATERAL COMMITMENT TO STAY THE COURSE OF THE PACIFICATION PROCESS THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO ACCORDS. HOWEVER, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT ALTHOUGH SYRIA MAY HAVE AGREED TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE CHRISTIANS, IT HAS NOT AGREED TO PURSUE AGGRESSIVELY THE CONFLICT ALONGSIDE THE CHRISTIANS. THIS IS THE MARONITE LEADERS' PROBLEM BECAUSE THEY KNOW THAT THEY ALONE DO NOT HAVE THE MIGHT TO FORCE THE PALESTINIANS TO THEIR KNEES IN A REASONABLE TIME OR BEFORE THEY EXHAUST THEMSELVES (THIS DOES NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT THE MARONITES WON'T TRY).

3. CONSEQUENTLY, THEY WOULD LIKE THE USG TO GIVE THE SYRIANS SUFFICIENT SUPPORT TO EMBOLDEN THEM TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE AND DECISIVE ROLE IN THE CONFLICT. THEY WOULD ALSO LIKE US TO PRESSURE ARAB STATES SUCH AS KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA, AND THE GULF STATES TO CEASE THEIR SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT TO THE PALESTINIANS OR TO USE IT AS A LEVER TO INDUCE THE PALESTINIANS TO ACCEPT A SETTLEMENT ON CHRISTIAN TERMS. THEY WOULD ALSO LIKE US TO PERSUADE SADAT TO CEASE HIS ATTACKS ON ASAD.

4. IN THE MEANTIME, THE PHALANGISTS ARE CONTINUING THEIR CONTACTS WITH THE PALESTINIANS THROUGH PIERRE GEMAYEL'S SECOND SON, BASHIR. THE CHAMOUNISTS, ACCORDING TO DORY CHAMOUN, ARE NOT PURSUING THE PALESTINIANS. THIS PERHAPS REFLECTS A DIFFERENCE IN CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE SITUATION AS BETWEEN THE CHAMOUNISTS AND THE PHALANGISTS. THE

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CHAMOUNISTS, ACCORDING TO DORY, JUST DON'T THINK IT'S WORTH DOING.

5. BOTH SHEIKH PIERRE AND FRANGIEH WOULD ACCEPT A POLITICAL TRUCE, IF COMBINED WITH AN OUTSIDE FORCE TO MAINTAIN THE PEACE, IN ORDER TO PROVIDE A PERIOD OF CALM IN WHICH TO WORK OUT A MORE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT THE CHAMOUNISTS

CONSIDER THAT THE OTHER SIDE WOULD NOT HONOR A TRUCE, AND THEREFORE THEY MIGHT JUST AS WELL CONTINUE THE FIGHT UNTIL THE PALESTINIANS ARE PREPARED TO ACCEPT A PERMANENT SETTLEMENT. WE DON'T THINK FRANGIEH AND GEMAYAL ARE CONFIDENT A REAL TRUCE IS POSSIBLE, BUT THEY ARE WILLING TO TRY.

6. IF AND WHEN THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IS SETTLED, ALL THE MARONITE LEADERS ENVISAGE A RELATIVELY QUICK AND EASY RESOLUTION OF PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE MOSLEM AND THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES. MICHEL KHOURY MAINTAINED THAT WITH THE PALESTINIANS UNDER CONTROL, PIERRE GEMAYEL WOULD BE WILLING IN NEGOTIATION TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT CONCESSIONS TO THE MOSLEM COMMUNITY INCLUDING, FOR EXAMPLE, ACCEPTING THE PRINCIPLE BUT NOT THE FACT OF A MOSLEM PRESIDENT OF LEBANON. IN ANY EVENT, THIS ASPECT OF A PERMANENT SETTLEMENT WAS CONSIDERED SIMPLE TO RESOLVE AND HARDLY DISCUSSED DURING OUR VISIT. NO ONE APPEARS TO QUESTION THE VALIDITY OF THE AGREEMENT MADE BY FRANGIEH AT BAABDA IN FEBRUARY.

7. THUS, IN SUMMARY, UNLESS THE SYRIANS MOVE AGGRESSIVELY AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS OR THERE IS OUTSIDE PRESSURE, THE PROSPECT IN MARONITE EYES IS FOR A CONTINUANCE OF THE PRESENT FIGHTING.  
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